UNITED
NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the
Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.319
30 September 1996

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Thirteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 319th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 25 September 1996, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mrs. BELEMBAOGO

CONTENTS

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (continued)

Morocco (continued)

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Official Records Editing Section, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of the Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.96-18309 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Morocco (CRC/C/28/Add.1; CRC/C/Q/MOR.1) (continued)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Benjelloun Touimi, Mr. Moslih, Mrs. Benjelloun, Mr. Hamadi, Mr. Benmakhlouf and Mr. Tyane (Morocco) resumed places at the Committee table.

2. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to ask questions on the sections of the list of issues (CRC/C/Q/MOR.1) entitled "Family environment and alternative care" and "Basic health and welfare".

3. Mr. KOLOSOV said it appeared from the report that no actual adoption procedure existed in Morocco and that the kafala procedure applied. Was that the case also where children of religious faiths other than Islam - for instance, Christianity - were concerned or was the number of such children so small that it was not considered necessary to make provision for them? He was somewhat concerned to note that adoption did not seem to be governed by legislation of any kind.

4. Mrs. KARP said she would appreciate clarification on the status of a child born out of wedlock, especially with regard to the right to bear its father's name, the right to know its father and the right to inherit. Paragraph 138 of the report seemed to suggest that family allowances and welfare benefits for children were allocated only to civil servants and the military. How far did that accord with the State's obligation under article 18, paragraph 2, of the Convention to render appropriate assistance to families in raising their children? What steps were taken to ensure that a woman divorced against her will received alimony and, in particular, had the Government provided any mechanism for enabling her to sue her ex-husband? Did divorces of that kind have an impact on children growing up in families without fathers and how was the law coping with any problems that might arise as a result?

5. Mr. HAMMARBERG said that he would be interested to learn how Morocco was dealing with the problem of corporal punishment and violence within the family. It had stated that doctors were instructed to report cases of battered children so that they could be brought before the courts, but that should be seen as a last resort, since court hearings could be very traumatic for children. Violence in families could occur for many reasons, including poverty and alcoholism. Did Morocco have any programme to increase public awareness of the problem, notably by instructing social workers, nurses and teachers to act as monitors and to give advice and help when needed?

6. Miss MASON said she understood that, in Morocco, only legitimate children were recognized. Did children born out of wedlock have the same access as legitimate children to social, health and other services and did the stigma attached to illegitimacy affect their chances of finding employment in later life?

7. Mrs. SARDENBERG said she would like clarification about the current status of marriage in Morocco and how far traditional practices still prevailed. For example, did arranged marriages or polygamous marriages often occur or were they confined to the more remote regions of the country?

8. Mr. BENJELLOUN TOUIMI (Morocco), replying to the question raised by Mr. Kolosov, said that although Muslim law, including the system of kafala, applied only to Muslims, a child adopted under that system could be the child of parents of any religion. On the question of illegitimacy, under Moroccan legislation, a child born out of wedlock did not have the same rights as a legitimate child, although it did have the right to know its father's name. Efforts were being made to avoid handicapping such children in later life, for instance, by discontinuing the use of the expression "father unknown" on official forms and by seeing to it that their situation was made as acceptable as possible. However, Muslim law on the matter could not be changed.

9. There was in fact legislation in place to ensure that family allowances and welfare benefits were paid to all employees, whether in the public or in the private sector. The problem of how a divorced wife's right to alimony could be guaranteed was, unfortunately, a fairly universal one, but some amendments to the law had been introduced in an effort to improve the situation. On the point raised by Mr. Hammarberg, a number of programmes, including a programme to increase public awareness, were under way in an effort to combat the scourge of domestic violence. However, the Government was aware that much still remained to be done, since the problem was linked to levels of economic and social development, as well as to regional factors.

10. In reply to the question put by Miss Mason, he said that the policy was to try to avoid making social distinctions between children born in and out of wedlock and to ensure that both were offered the same opportunities. On the point raised by Mrs. Sardenberg, he said that the practice of arranged marriage was no longer widespread in the country, partly because the media had helped people to become more aware of other cultures. Polygamy was discouraged by economic factors, since Muslim law required that all wives should be given equal treatment and the cost of keeping several wives was thus high.

11. Morocco greatly valued the institution of marriage, although unfortunately, as in many other countries, it was now under threat. The Government was therefore trying to emphasize the basic importance of the family unit. Moroccans did not aspire to adopt the concept of the "modern" family; rather, they thought it preferable to try to improve on the "traditional" family concept they already knew.

12. Mr. MOSLIH (Morocco) confirmed that, although adoption as such did not exist in Morocco, it was possible under the kafala system for a Muslim to adopt a child regardless of that child's civil status or religion. A child born out of wedlock would take the name of his maternal grandfather.

13. Family allowances and welfare benefits were paid to the father as head of the family, either by the State in the case of a public sector employee, or through a social welfare fund in the case of a private sector employee. It was true that, under Islamic law, women could be divorced by their husbands

against their will, but, following the adoption of the Convention in 1993, that law had been amended so that the husband now had to justify such a step. The judge was now required to endeavour to reconcile the couple in order to keep the family together. If reconciliation failed, the judge would decide on the alimony to be awarded on the basis of the husband's income. Custody of girls up to 13 years of age and of boys up to 12 years of age was normally given to the mother, after which the child could choose which parent to live with. Alimony would be paid by the father for girl children up till marriage and for boy children up to 16 years of age or up to 21 years of age if the boy chose to continue his studies.

14. Morocco was doing all it could to find a solution to the problem of domestic violence. Under Islamic law, not only physical attacks, but also the use of swear words against a wife, could be considered as acts of violence and the victim would be entitled to bring a complaint which could lead to the institution of criminal proceedings.

15. Mrs. KARP said that the law relating to children born out of wedlock appeared to be in conflict with many principles of the Convention. The Islamic principle involved was apparently clear and not open to a different interpretation, but, provided that no categorical prohibition was involved, some legislative means could perhaps be found to allow it to be waived and so permit the gap between the Code on Personal Status and the Convention to be closed. Moroccan lawmakers had, for example, managed to find a way to avoid confrontation with the religious principle that permitted a man summarily to divorce his wife.

16. With regard to the payment of alimony, many States now followed the practice of establishing a State fund out of which alimony could be paid when a husband was in default. The sums disbursed would then be recovered by the State from the husband concerned. Such a procedure guaranteed receipt of alimony even where a wife did not have the means to institute proceedings herself. Could such a system be instituted in Morocco?

17. Was there any legislation to protect the victim of violence within the family from further victimization during court proceedings? Were there any provisions to enable a child to give evidence without the parents being present? Were any measures in place, such as the provision of special police investigators, to ensure that a child could give evidence without being subjected to further victimization? Did any legislation exist to help victims overcome a reluctance to talk about matters, such as loss of virginity, that might lead them to be considered disgraced?

18. Mr. KOLOSOV asked whether, should the father in a Christian family die and the mother remarry another Christian, the second husband would be permitted, if he so wished, to adopt the wife's children by her first husband. If that procedure was not open to Moroccan members of religions other than Islam, then the claim to freedom of religion would have to be considered merely a matter of form.

19. The CHAIRPERSON asked whether children born out of wedlock represented a major problem in Morocco. Had there been any attempt to determine their numbers? Before any consideration could be given to legislative reform, more information was needed on the scale of the phenomenon.

20. A considerable body of information was available on the situation of girls in domestic service in families. It was a common practice in many African countries for girls to be placed in other families in exchange for a cash compensation to the parents. However, there was an increasing trend for families to abuse their power over such girls; some were being subjected to gross violence. Had any surveys been carried out in Morocco to determine the extent of such abuse there? That information would be of use in comparative studies of trends in other countries.

21. Mr. BENJELLOUN TOUIMI (Morocco) said that, in the case of a family of Christians, the type of adoption described by Mr. Kolosov would be permitted.

22. To answer Mrs. Karp's question, he said that the Islamic principle that a natural child or a child born out of wedlock could not inherit was precise and absolute; no possibility of derogation existed. Remedies would have to be sought by other means. A father was, for example, not precluded from leaving a legacy to a natural child. Although Islamic principles could not be modified, efforts were being made to introduce changes in a number of areas by making certain options available on a voluntary basis. That was the way in which conformity to the Convention could be achieved and equal opportunities in the social sphere ensured. A number of such measures had already been taken to soften the impact of classical Islamic law; others would follow.

23. The measures necessary to allow the State to take proceedings against defaulting husbands and to pay alimony had already been introduced into Moroccan law.

24. There were no special legal procedures available for dealing with child victims of violence, but judges could order measures of protection at their own discretion. There was room for improvement in the treatment of such cases in order to make it easier for children subjected to abuse or violence to give evidence.

25. Mrs. BENJELLOUN (Morocco) said that the Moroccan League for the Protection of Children had already carried out one study on children born out of wedlock. It had another survey currently under way in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

26. In cooperation with the Ministry of Health, the League had also organized an information day devoted to young girls in domestic service, whose situation was currently one of exploitation rather than the training experience originally intended. As a consequence, a follow-up committee had been established in which the various departments involved were represented. Legal, social and communication and awareness commissions had with a number of short-term, medium-term and long-term goals also been established and were already working to publicize the problem and accelerate the introduction of appropriate legislation.

27. Mr. HAMADI (Morocco), replying to Mr. Hammarberg, said that the medical profession was involved through the school health system in the detection of cases of physical violence. Regular health visits were made to all educational establishments and detailed information gathered. In 1994, the Ministry of Health had distributed a circular to the medical profession in Arabic and French on the subject of child beating, which gave instructions on the measures to be taken when such cases were found; in severe instances, the alleged perpetrator was remanded in custody while an investigation was carried out.

28. The persons conducting the survey of young girls in domestic service sponsored by the Moroccan League for the Protection of Children in cooperation with the Ministry of Health had encountered great difficulty in entering homes in order to gather information. Work was currently under way on a more detailed survey to obtain the information needed to take effective measures.

29. Mr. KOLOSOV said that paragraph 145 of the report gave the impression that full adoption was not available to any Moroccan citizen. That appeared to be in conflict with Mr. Benjelloun Touimi's earlier statement that adoption was possible in some cases.

30. Mr. HAMMARBERG said that the Moroccan delegation had rightly emphasized the legal and judicial aspects of efforts to combat domestic violence. It was very necessary that countries should have clear legislation reflecting all aspects of article 19 of the Convention, which was very stringent in its attitude towards violence. Professionals other than medical practitioners should also be involved in the reporting of cases of violence. However, he assumed that as yet few cases involving violence against children had been brought before the courts. Efforts were thus needed to make it easier to bring such cases to court and also to take action to prevent such violence occurring.

31. In the context of discrimination in education, attention must be given to the problem of education for disabled children. It was known that children who were unable to start or continue with school tended to be socially disadvantaged. Schools in many countries were unprepared to admit disabled children. An important task for the High Commissioner for the Disabled would be to ensure that the educational system could absorb such children. The solution was not to establish special residential institutions in which children became isolated from their homes and families. Nor would such institutions be able to cope with the large number of children involved. It was essential to develop a community-based approach.

32. Mrs. KARP said that any comprehensive programme designed to deal with family violence and abuse should not focus on court procedures alone. A complementary approach would be to make it mandatory not only for medical workers, but also for teachers, social workers and other professionals in contact with children, to report suspected cases of child abuse to enable legal proceedings to be instituted. In addition, services for the rehabilitation of abused children could be brought into play during the initial police investigation and subsequent court proceedings in order to provide immediate care.

33. Mrs. SARDENBERG said there appeared to be a high incidence of disability in Morocco; some reports indicated that many indigent disabled children survived by begging. Did the High Commissioner's Office have any measures in mind to give indigent families access to appliances for the disabled or to provide other options than residential care for disabled children? Was the need for disabled children to attend school covered in the training of nurses and teachers? What measures had the Government in mind for making urban and rural areas aware of the need for such action?

34. The CHAIRPERSON said that traditional ways of life had almost ceased to exist in many countries. In Muslim countries, classic Islamic law was not always adapted to present-day conditions; there was an increasing tendency to talk of modern Islamic law. It was incumbent on the Committee to encourage the acceleration of the changes in that direction that were already taking place in Morocco without undermining fundamental principles. Reforms had to be undertaken as part of an overall plan tailored to Morocco's specific needs. Legislation also had to be adopted to deal with specific problems, such as that of young girls in domestic service. In such instances, creating awareness of the problem was an essential step and should continue until measures to deal with the problem were in place. One useful measure in her own country had been the establishment of children's associations to provide a channel for their information.

35. Mr. BENJELLOUN TOUIMI (Morocco) said that, to the best of his knowledge, the situation described in paragraph 145 of the report applied only to Muslim families was correct. Some aspects of Moroccan law did not apply to non-Muslim or non-Jewish citizens. However, he would inquire further into the matter with the Ministry of Justice and provide a detailed answer in writing at a later date.

36. Generally speaking, the Moroccan delegation was very aware that there were some inconsistencies between the provisions of the Convention and Moroccan legislation. Morocco was endeavouring to introduce direct reforms where possible. However, Islamic law was very strict and not amenable to amendment. Some reforms were thus precluded. Every effort would however be made to take measures that would allow the aims of the Convention to be achieved without detriment to the principles embodied in Islamic law.

37. His delegation looked forward to receiving the Committee's recommendations on ways to improve the implementation of the Convention in Morocco and would pursue the matter with the Moroccan authorities. However, it should not be forgotten that, although there might be a national will for change, budgetary and other constraints often prevented comprehensive action from being taken. It was therefore necessary to set priorities for action on children's rights to ensure that the most urgent needs were met first.

38. Mr. BENMAKHLOUF (Morocco) said that the Code of Personal Status clearly stated that the kefala procedures referred to in paragraph 145 of the report applied only to Muslims. Christian families were thus exempt from those provisions. However, if a Christian woman took a Muslim as a second husband, he would not be entitled under the kefala to adopt her children by a former marriage.

39. Work to better the situation of disabled children had begun in Morocco in the 1960s with the establishment of a number of associations looking after their interests and presided over by members of the royal family. Those efforts had been strengthened by the creation in 1993 of the Office of the High Commissioner for the Disabled, whose work had been described in detail in the report.

40. Mr. TYANE (Morocco), replying to Mr. Hammarberg's question, said that the rehabilitation and return of disabled persons to their home environments was an approach being tested in a pilot scheme in Morocco, following participation in workshops on the subject held in Amman in 1994 and 1995. The project had been in operation only one year and not enough feedback had yet been generated, but, once preliminary evaluations had been made available, the extension of the scheme to other provinces could be envisaged.

41. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to ask questions on the sections of the list of issues entitled "General measures of implementation" and "Special protection measures".

42. Mrs. KARP asked whether the Government had begun to implement its strategy to close the educational gap between boys and girls and, if not, what the prospects for its implementation might be.

43. Since French was the language of instruction for science subjects in Morocco, she wondered how students whose only language was Arabic would have access to higher education in those subjects.

44. She also asked how the budget was apportioned among the various levels of the education system.

45. Mrs. SARDENBERG said that she would like more information on the integration of the Berber population into Moroccan society and on the status of children in that linguistic group. Had the Convention been translated into Berber dialect?

46. Miss MASON asked whether schools in Morocco were single-sex or co-educational, whether female teachers taught male students and, conversely, whether male teachers taught female students.

47. She was also interested in the status of teachers in Morocco. Did the Government's plan for teacher training apply to teachers at the primary school level and what was the pupil-teacher ratio?

48. Mr. KOLOSOV asked the Moroccan delegation to define the term "foreign communities", as used in paragraph 275 of the report. He wished to know whether the Government's educational support programmes covered the schooling of "foreign communities" and the Jewish community.

49. Mr. BENJELLOUN TOUIMI (Morocco) said that, although his Government's policy was to avoid or reduce discrepancies in the education of boys and girls, he did not believe that it had adopted specific measures to bridge the existing gap.

50. Morocco's official language was Arabic. French was a working language and was compulsory at the primary and secondary school levels. The Government had endeavoured to adopt a multilingual approach by promoting the use of English and Spanish in addition to French and Arabic. Students were free to continue their studies in the language of instruction with which they had begun. However, in cases where text books were not available for particular subjects in Arabic, those subjects had to be studied in one of the other languages. There was no language discrimination with regard to employment.

51. On the basis of a World Bank recommendation, the Government had adopted a strategy of emphasizing the teaching of science within the context of a plan to improve education at all levels.

52. In reply to the question on the Berber population, he said that Berbers had always been an inseparable component of Moroccan society. While they were allowed the freedom to enjoy their own culture and to use their own language, they received formal education in either Arabic, French or English and it was through those languages that they became acquainted with the Convention. Since Berber dialects were oral rather than written, the Government had adapted its awareness programmes accordingly.

53. In Moroccan tradition, non-Muslims and non-Jews were regarded as foreigners and, with the exception of the elements relating specifically to Muslims, the Code on Personal Status applied to them.

54. He would make the exact figures on budgetary allocations for education available to the Committee in writing.

55. Mr. KOLOSOV, referring to paragraphs 310 to 312 of the report on the administration of juvenile justice, asked whether 20-year sentences were not considered excessive for juveniles under 16 years of age. He also asked why persons aged between 16 and 18 years were regarded as persons of full age. He wondered whether the Moroccan Government had any intention of changing that low age-limit in order to bring it into line with the provisions of the Convention.

56. Mr. HAMMARBERG, referring to articles 37 and 40 of the Convention, asked how Morocco guaranteed that persons under the age of 18 years serving prison sentences were treated humanely.

57. Mrs. KARP asked why the Moroccan Government differentiated between the legal system applicable to persons up to the age of 12 years and the system applied to persons between the ages of 12 and 16 years. She also wished to know whether the Government had considered the possibility of moving the procedure for dealing with children under 12 years old from the regular courts into the jurisdiction of the juvenile courts, where judges had greater expertise in matters relating to children.

58. Miss MASON, referring to paragraphs 299, 300 and 313, pointed out that the report did not make a clear distinction between the terms "minor" and "child" or between the terms "crime" and "offence". With regard to paragraphs 309 and 306 of the report, she asked in which facilities minors between the ages of 12 and 16 were placed in the exceptional cases mentioned.

59. Mrs. KARP requested the Moroccan delegation to comment on information the Committee had received on the unlawful detention of children in Western Sahara.

60. Mr. BENJELLOUN TOUIMI (Morocco) said the Penal Code of Morocco made a distinction between the ages of criminal and civil majority, as stated in paragraphs 36 to 42 of the report. There had been periodic reforms of the Penal Code and it was envisaged that future reforms would bring existing legislation into line with the Convention.

61. Mr. BENMAKHLOUF (Morocco) explained that the terms "minor" and "child" were used in the report with two not very different, yet complementary, meanings. The term "child" was used in the context of the Convention to refer to leisure and education, for example, while "minor" was a legal term used in the Penal Code.

62. Miss Mason's question about the distinction between "offences" and "crimes" was answered in paragraphs 299 and 300 of the report, which stated that minors who committed "offences" were tried by the courts of first instance, while minors who committed "crimes" were tried by the criminal division of the Court of Appeal.

63. Replying to the question on the separation of children from adults in prisons, he said that Moroccan legislation adopted in 1915 provided that minors between 12 and 16 years of age must be separated from adults. Paragraph 306 of the report listed the various institutions responsible for the training and rehabilitation of minors.

64. Mr. BENJELLOUN TOUIMI (Morocco) said there were no Western Saharan children imprisoned in Morocco. The case to which Mrs. Karp had referred had been a highly political issue and it had been settled by the Government of Morocco in an atmosphere of complete transparency.

65. The CHAIRPERSON welcomed the fact that the Moroccan delegation had expressed the Government's willingness to pursue certain legislative reforms, particularly on the determination of the age of criminal majority in conformity with the Convention, and to guarantee children all the necessary social and legal assistance.

66. She stressed the importance of efforts to provide facilities separating minors in detention from adults and to convert such facilities into training and rehabilitation centres.

67. Mrs. KARP said that it seemed to be suggested in the written replies to the list of issues that there was no problem of child prostitution in Morocco. She asked whether any research had been carried out in order to verify that that was indeed the situation and, if not, whether there was any intention to conduct such research in order to devise a plan of action if necessary.

68. Miss MASON said that she associated herself with Mrs. Karp's question.

69. Mr. BENJELLOUN TOUIMI (Morocco) said that, while it could not be stated categorically that the problem of child prostitution did not exist in Morocco, since no actual research had been carried out, the phenomenon did not seem to be widespread. It might be wise to look into it more deeply, but Morocco, like all countries, must follow a system of priorities and deal first with the most immediate problems.

70. The CHAIRPERSON said that some information on the possible existence of child prostitution in Morocco had been brought to the Committee's attention. It was, of course, a State's prerogative to set its own priorities, but the Committee did recommend a study of the issue on the grounds that it was easier to take effective action at an early stage.

71. Miss MASON said that the problem of street children also seemed to be emerging in Morocco. She asked whether any survey had been made to discover where and how such children lived and what possibilities there were for their rehabilitation.

72. Mr. BENJELLOUN TOUIMI (Morocco) said he understood that a start had been made on such research. So far, the country was just beginning to be aware of the problem. He believed that the National Congress on the Rights of the Child was trying to start a research project in that connection.

73. The CHAIRPERSON invited the members of the Committee to present their concluding observations.

74. Mr. KOLOSOV said that it was his impression from the report and the written and oral replies to the Committee's questions that, although Morocco had good intentions and plans were afoot for legislative reform, the lives and well-being of children were not the country's first priority. The spirit of the Convention, however, and other important international instruments such as the 1993 Vienna Declaration required all of mankind to give priority to children's issues. He urged the Government to remember, in reaching its legislative and budgetary decisions, that children were the country's future and must come first.

75. Mr. HAMMARBERG said that the very interesting contributions of the Moroccan delegation had left him with the feeling that there were two broad problems as far as the enhancement of children's rights was concerned: the risk of a backlash if pressure for reform was too overt and budgetary constraints. The force of budgetary constraints was recognized in the Convention itself, but how to deal with the first problem was a question for Morocco alone.

76. His general impression was that, while many areas had been touched on in the way of reform, much remained to be done. The attention of decision-makers must be drawn to the vital importance of children's rights to the future of the country. More specifically, action needed to be taken in the field of law to change the Penal Code and to complete the reform of the Labour Code in order to regulate against exploitative child labour. In the whole decision-making process, including budgetary decisions, the best interests of

children must be borne in mind. Methods of data collection and review should be improved and work was still needed on systematizing the approach to the education of key professionals concerned with children's matters.

77. With regard to mechanisms, there was a need to strengthen the relationship with NGOs and civil society, to increase coordination among the various Ministries, to improve the linkage between the central and regional authorities and, lastly, to set up some kind of independent monitoring body along the lines of the Scandinavian institution of the ombudsman. He noted that there was already a High Commissioner for Disabled Persons who could perhaps serve as a model.

78. Certain subject areas, such as discrimination in the education of girls and the disabled, inequalities between rural and urban conditions and domestic violence called for greater in-depth study. The effort that needed to be made should involve not only the traditional political authorities, but religious leaders and local leaders as well. The whole question was very much one of attitude and key professionals such as teachers and police should be involved in information campaigns to be carried out among the public at large so that lip-service to the provisions of the Convention could give place to real change.

79. Mrs. SARDENBERG said that the Moroccan delegation's willing cooperation in the very constructive dialogue reflected the country's commitment to the Convention. She urged the authorities to take advantage of a time when attention could be drawn to the submission of the report, the Committee's forthcoming visit to Morocco and the presentation of the concluding observations, to ensure that higher priority was given to children's rights in the political arena and among the general public. In conclusion, she reminded the Moroccan delegation of the importance of publishing the Convention and of enhancing the partnership with civil society and NGOs.

80. Mrs. KARP said that she joined in thanking the Moroccan delegation for a very positive and illuminating dialogue. She sensed that there was a will to work in accordance with the principles of the Convention. What was lacking, however, was a concrete overall picture of integrated and workable mechanisms and plans of action. The approach of the Convention was holistic, but her impression was that Morocco dealt with the problems of children in a fragmentary way. She strongly recommended giving priority to building an integrative system. Morocco was, of course, a Muslim society, and that meant that there might be gaps between the spirit of the Convention and attitudes among the public, often reflected in the legislation. Work to enhance public awareness of the rights of the child needed to be connected to what might be initiated by religious leaders, for example, possible new interpretations whereby religion could be adapted to modern life. There were other Muslim countries with problems similar to those of Morocco. One day, perhaps, a brainstorming team of religious leaders from Islamic countries might meet to discuss what could be done to close the gap between the principles of the Convention and principles of their religion. In closing, she stressed again that Morocco had to review the system of juvenile justice and give positive protection to the victims of crimes of violence and sexual abuse.

81. Miss MASON emphasized that the Convention required conformity, not uniformity. The Committee accepted that Morocco was a Muslim society, but, with a view to protecting its children, it should perhaps be more willing to seek help from outside. Public attitudes could not be legislated, but changes could nevertheless be made. She had the impression that, despite Morocco's ratification of the Convention, the rights of children were still somewhat repressed and needed to be further realized. She emphasized the need for further research into areas in which children might be candidates for abuse and, in the criminal justice system, the anomalous position of children between the ages of 16 and 18 should be redressed.

82. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Committee had tried to raise the most pertinent questions relating to the situation of children's rights in Morocco, even though the Government might not regard them as the most important. Prevention was always better than cure. In their concluding observations, the members of the Committee had encouraged the initiatives that were already in place and suggested new ones. Those comments would be put into more detailed shape and formally delivered to the Moroccan delegation at a later stage. With regard to legislation, she particularly urged the Government to adopt ILO Convention No. 138 on the minimum age for employment.

83. Mr. BENJELLOUN TOUIMI (Morocco) said that the delegation had learned a great deal from the frank and fascinating discussion. He stressed once more that the rights of children were genuinely a matter of priority for Morocco. All those concerned with any aspect of the question, including His Majesty the King, were convinced of it. Given the many areas that needed to be covered, however, attention had had to be devoted to the most urgent. After the exchange with the Committee, some of that attention would be redirected. More importance would be attached to coordination within the Government and between the Government and civil society. Action would also be taken on the legislative front. The new Labour Code, currently under study in Parliament, would take account of all the provisions of the Convention. A reference had been made to involving the religious authorities: he would remind the Committee that His Majesty the King was the highest religious authority in the Kingdom and that he was devoting much time to the issue. He thanked all the members of the Committee, the Chairperson in particular, for her skilful management of the discussion and her summing up.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.